

Kalamazoo, Muskegon, Washtenaw and Bay. Even commission races are affected by what happens at the top of the ticket, particularly if the party or the other wins in a blowout. With nearly three months remaining before the filing deadline and the overall candidate line-up largely undetermined, it's impossible to predict whether Dems can make gains for the third election in a row, but it is entirely possible unless the Republican top standard-bearer (most certainly John McCain) can manage to carry Michigan, which hasn't been done by a Republican presidential nominee since 1988.

Townships. Let's not forget Michigan's township officials — they will be nearly 6,500 of them on the ballot this year seeking four-year terms in 1,242 different fiefdoms. (No wonder Michigan has the longest ballot of any state in the nation in our primary and general elections in presidential years!) More than two-thirds of all township officials are Republicans (even in Wayne County!), according to a one-of-a-kind study commissioned by IMP and conducted by East Lansing-based Practical Political Consulting nine years ago. It hasn't changed since then, but IMP/PPC may undertake a statistical update that will be available later this spring.

Ballot Proposals. How many will we have this year? Two years ago, there were six — two of them placed on the statewide ballot by the Legislature. Right now, election division bean-counters in the Secretary of State's office are fly-specking signatures on the only petitions that have been handed in — a proposal to legalize medical marijuana. Still, there are at least eight other petition efforts currently circulating (everything from a new state seal to a new state flag). Research, with the promise of more. How many qualify for the ballot remains to be seen, because, by the time the filing deadline rolls around next July, there's usually a big drop-off from the number of possible questions that the electorate sees reported in the media during the spring.

TERM LIMITS IN 2008: HOW IMPORTANT WILL THEY BE?

More important than in 2006, but well short of the political punch packed in most election cycles during the past decade.

The lowpoint in term-limit turnover was in 2000, when only 21 House incumbents — 14 Democrats and seven Republicans — were forced to leave because of term limits. Not a single seat changed party hands — the only time in Michigan history that has happened. There were no elections for the state Senate that year.

In 1998, by contrast, 64 members of the state House of Representatives were forcibly retired (term limits for the Senate hadn't kicked in yet).

Another typical high-turnover year was 2002, which was a year of epic tumult due to term limits and reapportionment occurring simultaneously for the first time in Michigan history. That led to 52 open seats in the House and 27 in the Senate — more than half of the Legislature.

This year, however, should be somewhere in between those extremes — at least 45 seats will be

open in the House (44 due to term limits, one because Rep. **David Law** (R-Commerce) is leaving early to run for Oakland Co. Prosecuting Attorney), and no Senate seats are on the ballot at all.

Is there any chance there will be a ballot proposal this year to rescind term limits, or to at least extend the years that can be served? None, particularly after the most recent effort to lengthen term limits in California went down in flames (for the second time) on 'Super Tuesday,' Feb. 5.

All this means that the 2008 election is likely to produce a Michigan House with even less institutional wisdom than its predecessor. Furthermore, what little store of knowledge there is will be of very recent vintage — after all, while nearly two-thirds of the chamber in the 2009-10 session will be holdovers, none will have more than four years' experience, and less than a third will have just two.

But how worrisome should the dearth of seniority be in the 95th Legislature? Not very.

Fact is, even though the situation during the past few sessions appears to be unique — at least in comparison with the previous four decades — by historical standards it really isn't anything out of the ordinary.

That's the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from IMP's peek into the past. A decade ago, IMP commissioned East Lansing-based Practical Political Consulting to study every session of the Legislature dating back to the year Michigan became a state (1837) to find out how significant seniority really was back in the "good ol' days."

Now we've updated that study. So, what's the answer?

Experience or seniority (whatever you want to call it) never really existed!

Fact is, hardly any legislators served more than three two-year terms (or, before 1850, six one-year terms) in the 63 years following the advent of Michigan statehood — and not that many more enjoyed six-year tenures or longer in the first half of the 20th century, either. It was only in the 1960s that the accumulation of years of service in the state capital became widespread. Here are some specifics:

- There have been more than 30 previous Legislatures (covering a span of at least 60 years, more than a third of the state's history) that had a higher percentage of turnover than the current 94th has.

- Indeed, as recent a Legislature as the 73rd, which sat during 1965-66, had 65 freshmen in the House and 22 in the Senate, far more than the combined total of 39 "freshmen" now sitting in both chambers (and, remember, all of today's Senate freshmen served previously in the House).

- The 1933-34 Legislature, ushered in as a result of the massive FDR landslide, boasted 66 House members (out of a then-total of 100) who had not served in the previous session. Four sessions between 1901 and the end of World War I had 69, 73, 67, and 75 members, respectively, who either were freshmen or had no cumulative seniority in a body that was 10 members smaller than today's House. And every session before 1899 dating back to 1837, when Michigan became a state, had a higher percentage of freshmen than the

current one does. The 19th Legislature, which convened in 1877-78, had only two members (out of a hundred) who had served more than a pair of two-year terms. In fact, 91 of the 100 were full-fledged, wet-behind-the-ears, rube amateur frosh.

● A three-term lifetime limit would have shortened the service of only 11 members (!) of the Michigan House (out of some 2,700 total) before 1900, the vast majority of legislative sessions prior to 1900 were populated by representatives who were serving only one or two terms — and virtually none more than three.

● Beginning with the advent of the direct primary for nomination of all legislators in 1910, House service began to increase gradually in duration. Prior to that time, partisan nominations were won in district and county conventions, where the honors tended to be "passed around" after a brief stint of just one or two terms. Even after 1910, that custom persisted in many out-state districts.

● The number of representatives in the state House who had been elected more than three times didn't break into double digits until 1921, when for the first time there were 17 such members (out of 100).

● There was never more than about a third of House membership who had served longer than three two-year terms until 1955, when the House was expanded from 100 to 110 members. After that, and especially with the advent of increased salaries and legislative staff beginning in 1965, the number escalated.

● It's probably no coincidence that the high-water mark for number of legislators serving four-or-more terms came in 1989-90 (when there were 80) and 1991-92 (73), the two sessions just before a petition drive put term limits on the ballot, where it was adopted by voters by an almost 3-2 margin. It just could be that the electorate thought that lengthy service in the Legislature had gone too far.

Here's the run-down, year-by-year:

Session	# of Members Serving More Than 3 Terms	Session	# of Members Serving More Than 3 Terms
1851-52	0	1893-94	0
1853-54	0	1895-96	0
1855-56	0	1897-98	0
1857-58	0	1899-1900	1
1859-60	0	1901-02	0
1861-62	1	1903-04	1
1863-64*	0	1905-06	2
1865-66	0	1907-08	5
1867-68	1	1909-10	3
1869-70	2	1911-12	2
1871-72	1	1913-14	5
1873-74	1	1915-16	7
1875-76	0	1917-18	8
1877-78	0	1919-20	9
1879-80	2	1921-22	17
1881-82	1	1923-24	12
1883-84	0	1925-26	12
1885-86	1	1927-28	17
1887-88	1	1929-30	22
1889-90	0	1931-32	32
1891-92	1	1933-34	14

1935-36	17	1973-74	53
1937-38	10	1975-76	46
1939-40	15	1977-78	51
1941-42	35	1979-80	46
1943-44	37	1981-82	54
1945-46	37	1983-84	41
1947-48	28	1985-86	52
1949-50	27	1987-88	53
1951-52	32	1989-90	80 —
1953-54	37	1991-92	73 —
1955-56**	41	1993-94	56
1957-58	44	1995-96	49
1959-60	47	1997-98	45
1961-62	60	1999-2000	2#
1963-64	58	2001-02	0
1965-66	36	2003-04	2#
1967-68	30	2005-06	2#
1969-70	33	2007-08	2#
1971-72	53		

* In 1863-64, House size was set at 100

** In 1955-56, House size was boosted to 110

In 1999-2000, Reps. **Gerald Law** (R-Plymouth) and **Ed Vaughn** (D-Detroit) served their eighth and fourth terms, respectively, because of previous stints prior to the time the term limits clock started running. In 2003-04, Reps. **Alma Stallworth** (D-Detroit) and **William Van Regenmorter** (R-Hudsonville) served their 10th and fifth terms, respectively, for the same reason. In 2005-06, Reps. **Dianne Byrum** (D-Ononadaga) and **George Cushingberry** (D-Detroit) served their fourth and fifth terms, respectively. In the current session, Cushingberry is serving his sixth term (and he can serve one more), and Rep. **Dave Robertson** (R-Grand Blanc) is serving his fourth, which will be his last.

THEY SAID IT

■ "This is the weakest administration and the worst governor in Michigan's history -- we all hear that out there" — U.S. Rep. **Candice Miller** (R-MI 10), blasting Gov. **Jennifer Granholm** in her Saturday morning speech to delegates to the Michigan Republican Party's 2008 winter convention at the Lansing Center (2/16). Miller, who passed out blue thundersticks emblazoned with her name to all the delegates, sounded more like a 2010 gubernatorial candidate than anybody else at the conclave.

■ "I'm headed to Las Vegas to see **Jermain Taylor** fight tonight. I go to all his fights. We don't have a major sports franchise in Arkansas, so he's the closest thing to it." — **Janet Huckabee**, former First Lady of Arkansas and wife of GOP presidential candidate **Mike Huckabee**, responding to IMP's query as to where she was going next, after addressing Michigan Republicans (see above). Unfortunately for the fight buff, she saw Taylor, a 29-year-old former world middleweight champion from Little Rock, lose a unanimous decision in 12 rounds to his nemesis, skinhead **Kelly Pavlik**, that same night (2/16).